

Game of psychology, skill, tactics and theory quietly sweeps across Nantucket

It's Croquet

By Steve Sheppard • Independent Sports Editor

SPORTS ISLAND

They're a hearty bunch, these croquet players. Neither rain nor fog nor strong winds will deter them, as was evident in the days leading up to last weekend's Nantucket Croquet Invitational at the Westmoor Club. There, on the lush lawn that was once the 'Field of Dreams' Little League diamond, players from up and down the east coast braved Thursday's winds before championship play began on Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

Players like Rilice and Al Lefton of the Merion Cricket Club in Haverford, Pa. (home of the largest croquet tournament in the world) who also happen to live in 'Sconset when they're truly at home. The Leftons, in fact, began playing croquet on Betty Phillips' 'Sconset lawn, one of several courts on the island where the playing area is putting-green smooth and the wickets are tight — very tight.

This is not the croquet you recall from childhood, where the wickets were arched, the course meandered around bushes and trees and pleasure came from "sending" your opponent into the next zip code. The croquet that is practiced on Nantucket today is far removed from its freeform backyard cousin. Forget the image of croquet as rustic or suburban. The growing croquet movement on Nantucket is devoted to a game that encourages precision and skill.

And it has more devotees than you'd think.

Take Finn Murphy, for example. When the former selectman first looked into 'real' croquet, fellow board member Michael Glowacki was already an aficionado. "Michael started playing first," Murphy acknowledged. "Independently of that, I started playing."

While the two may have had their differences politically, and didn't share a game while they both sat on the board, they have

See CROQUET, page 42



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Well-manicured lawns are only part of the allure. From top: a player lines up a shot during last weekend's Nantucket Invitational at the Westmoor Club. Center: as Sarah Strubel can attest while playing at Finn Murphy's, the wickets are considerably smaller than standard issue. Bottom: Christy Kickham ponders his strategy at Westmoor.